

Statement for the Record: Rep. Jim Matheson (UT-02)
House Natural Resources Full Committee Oversight Hearing
“Impacts of the Administration’s Wild Lands Order on Jobs and Economic Growth”
March 1, 2011

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record.

Secretary Salazar’s December announcement of a new “Wild Lands” policy was unexpected and another example of a top-down, Washington-driven approach to public lands issues that fails to recognize the importance of local input and what is best for states and communities. This is not the first time this approach has been taken. In fact, the history of public lands discussions in Utah has been dominated by highly charged rhetoric with all-or-none attitudes toward the issues. Though it’s easier to address complex issues with simple rhetoric and polarized points of view, it results in little real progress and many unresolved concerns.

There is a better way to approach stewardship of public lands. An inclusive approach where all stakeholders participate offers a path forward to resolve these many-sided topics. A bottom-up, stakeholder-driven process works best whether in implementation of an administrative proposal or development of legislation. This approach may take significant time and effort, but it allows the complexity of public lands issues to be addressed in a way that builds consensus and receives broad local support.

Administratively, this approach is supposed to be adopted and implemented under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). Under FLPMA, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is required to develop a comprehensive land use plan for multiple uses commonly referred to as a Resource Management Plan (RMP). The RMP serves as a roadmap for potential energy development, OHV usage, preservation of sensitive areas, protection of endangered species, harvesting of timber, grazing and wildlife protection. As the BLM develops its RMP, many different interest groups are encouraged to participate and provide feedback on the proposals.

A stakeholder-driven process can also create successful legislative actions regarding public lands. Senator Bob Bennett and I worked for over five years to develop and eventually enact the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act of 2008. This legislation resolved several critical public lands issues in Washington County, Utah including the identification of utility corridors and transportation routes, the disposal of surplus federal lands, the designation of wilderness and a Wild and Scenic River. This legislation provided a greater degree of certainty for all of the local interest groups so that their vision of the future recreational and economic landscape could be realized.

Prior to Secretary Salazar’s announcement of Order No 3310., the Administration made several public statements that appeared to support such a locally-driven stakeholder approach to public lands issues. Specifically, on October 1, 2009, when BLM Director Bob Abbey testified before the House Natural Resources Committee, he voiced support for legislation that is “home-grown” and “geographically-

focused” as was consistent with the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act. In particular, Director Abbey mentioned the legislation as a milestone in Utah regarding public lands issues. In addition, in February of 2010, a draft list of monument designations was leaked from the Department of Interior, including several in Utah. I wrote to Secretary Salazar condemning any discussions that did not involve stakeholders in local communities. I referenced the lingering anger in our state from a 1996 monument designation in Utah. Secretary Salazar responded on February 22, 2010, stating, “I also believe that any new designations and conservation initiatives work best when they build on local efforts to better manage places that are important to nearby communities.”

The announcement of the Secretary’s most recent order calls into question the substance of RMPs that were recently completed in Utah after several years of work. In fact, the Order seems to ignore all of the work that was done on these RMPs and creates renewed uncertainty for all stakeholders. Going forward, I believe it both fair and imperative that we resolve discrepancies between the words and actions of Secretary Salazar and Director Abbey regarding public lands issues in Utah and throughout the country. I feel strongly that any plan for land use in Utah must be developed through a collaborative process, involve local stakeholders, and seek consensus on future use of our shared resources. Additionally, it is critical for the economic prosperity of cities and counties in my district and throughout the state that we resolve inconsistencies in a timely manner so that they are able to adequately plan for the future and seize economic opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that this Secretarial Order undermines local efforts in Utah, is a heavy-handed decision by the Secretary, and creates economic uncertainty for our communities. On numerous occasions, we have been told that a locally-driven, collaborative approach is the right course to pursue in land use plans. This is a radical departure from those discussions. I look forward to a response from the Department of Interior as well as future dialogue with federal land managers regarding how local stakeholders can engage in the process.

Thank You.